

Canada - France  
Interparliamentary Association



Association interparlementaire  
Canada - France

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation  
respecting its participation at the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the  
Canada-France Interparliamentary Association**

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**Paris / Normandy / Pays de Loire, France  
August 31<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

# Report

From August 31<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup> 2011, nine Canadian parliamentarians were in France for the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Canada-France Interparliamentary Association. Senator Claudette Tardif led the delegation, comprised of Senator Gérald Comeau, Senator Jean-Claude Rivest, and Members of Parliament Lois Brown, Jacques Gourde, Bernard Trottier, Yvon Godin, Robert Aubin, and Mauril Bélanger. Accompanying the delegation were Executive Secretary Serge Pelletier and Analyst Jean-Rodrigue Paré.

The French delegation was led by National Assembly member Georges Colombier and comprised of Senator Marcel-Pierre Cléach, Senator Joël Bourdin and National Assembly members Marie-Noëlle Battistel, Catherine Coutelle and Jacques Desallangre. The French delegation was accompanied by Matthieu Meissonnier and Alexandre Michel, secretaries of the Association for the Senate and the National Assembly respectively.

The members of the Association also wish to recognize the invaluable assistance provided by Marc Berthiaume, Political and Parliamentary Relations Officer at the Embassy of Canada in France.

This report is divided in two parts. The first deals with briefings by the Embassy of Canada in France and the Association's meetings on the four selected themes: voting methods and democratic issues; family policy: a social and economic issue; the future of the nuclear industry post Fukushima; and issues related to the Canada-European Union Free Trade Agreement. The second deals with the visits and meetings the Canadian delegation was able to arrange while in France.

## I. Themed Meetings

Themed meetings are central to the Association's work. They enable parliamentarians to discuss subjects of common interest from differing points of view prompted by the unique political dynamics of Canada and France. The outcomes of this dialogue can then be relayed by members to their respective parliaments and governments.

### A. Briefings by Representatives of the Embassy of Canada in France

On the evening of August 31<sup>st</sup>, the Canadian delegation attended a working dinner with representatives of the Embassy of Canada at the invitation of the chargé d'affaires, Kim Butler. These briefings gave the members an overview of political and economic issues in France that are of particular interest to the Government of Canada.

#### Political issues

Marc Berthiaume presented the pre-election situation and the Socialist Party leadership race, two topical subjects that are drawing a great deal of attention. He spoke about the challenges facing President Sarkozy with the presidential election less than a year

away. Inversely, the primary elections system put in place by the Socialist Party to choose a presidential candidate has given new impetus to the Party and provided the candidates, Martine Aubry and François Hollande in particular, with some early publicity.

### Economic issues

Jean-Dominique Lerachi, Minister Counsellor, Trade and Economic Affairs, explained that the global crisis has had serious repercussions in France. The public treasury was known to be in a poor state before the crisis, but the situation had never been challenging enough for certain social benefits to be called into question, such as the retirement age, the work week, vacations, pensions, etc. Uncertainty now hangs over these elements, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to guarantee that they can be preserved.

### Diplomatic issues

Louise Blais, Minister Counsellor, Political Affairs, stated that the consequences of the economic crisis are central to the bilateral discussions taking place alongside the negotiation of a free trade agreement between Canada and the European Union. Energy, in particular shale gas and oil sands exploitation, continues to be a source of concern in France. Ms. Blais concluded by saying that she hopes to secure parliamentarians' support for Canada's and France's efforts to have the Normandy Landing beaches recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The overall focus was on the European Union, but the fact remains that the relationship between France and Canada remains a special one.

## **B. Voting Methods and Democratic Issues**

The Association's deliberations on this subject began the morning of September 1<sup>st</sup>.

Senator Comeau spoke about the unique features of the Canadian electoral system, which limits the influence of opinion polls on democratic discourse. Opinion polls provide a relatively accurate picture of overall trends in voting intentions, but they do not indicate what the specific breakdown of those intentions might be in a given riding, so they cannot predict the outcome of an election with any certainty. On the other hand, proportional voting in France means that a survey with a relatively small sample can predict the outcome of an election fairly accurately. There are therefore considerably more opinion polls in France, and they have greater influence, especially during a presidential election.

There are rules in Canada which govern the broadcasting of polling results and the publication of methodological data, but they are rarely followed word for word. This was the primary theme of the ensuing discussion. Mr. Desallangre expressed the view that polls should be banned outright. Mr. Godin seconded that opinion. Mr. Colombier added that the cost of polling could create inequality that would be unhealthy for democracy. Senator Cléach stated that polls, instead of simply reflecting public opinion, provide a way to mobilize groups of voters against a candidate. According to Senator Rivest, the principle of freedom of expression limits what can be imposed on polling firms. Ideally,

choices would be made based on the quality of public policy, but the reality is that politicians are fond of polls and are focused on individuals. Ms. Coutelle described the media's quasi-obsession with polls the closer it gets to voting day. Finally, there were signs of consensus following Mr. Bélanger's statement that it would be good to hold polling firms to a higher standard of rigour.

Mr. Godin then expressed a critical view of the negative advertising strategies that have emerged in Canada in recent years. In his opinion, these strategies validate public cynicism about politics and subvert discussion of genuine problems. They help reinforce rumours and fears that in some cases are unfounded, and instead of focusing discussion on the quality of programs, they seek only to destroy the opponent. He also criticized the decision by the Government of Canada to eliminate a category of subsidies to political parties, as that could drive us into an American-style situation where money outweighs people's real needs. He believes the approximately two dollars per voter given to parties annually based on the number of votes they receive is a small price to pay for a healthy democracy.

During the debate that followed, Mr. Bélanger recounted the events that led to a reduction in corporate donations and the introduction of government subsidies for political parties as compensation for the parties that were penalized. Mr. Trottier reminded the participants that despite its plan to phase out direct subsidies based on the number of votes each party receives, the government left untouched tax credits for personal donations to parties and partial reimbursement for electoral expenses. Mr. Colombier said he agreed with public funding of political parties. Senators Rivest and Cléach underscored the public distrust towards individuals and businesses that contribute to political parties.

Mr. Trottier spoke about the consequences of using social media in election campaigns. Although it is difficult to show a causal link between the use of social media and voter support, social media undeniably help mobilize voters who are already sympathetic. Technological developments also offer new opportunities, such as "telephone town halls," that make it possible to identify a large number of supporters in a short time. On the other hand, social media present a risk for politicians, whose words can be quickly picked up and disseminated. In that sense, they amount to a sort of "electronic leash" that politicians can never escape. They do have benefits, but these new media can also pose a significant political risk.

During the discussion, all of the participants acknowledged that social media are a useful way of reaching many people at little cost and mobilizing young voters. Mr. Aubin gave an account of how, with very few means, he managed to rally a large number of young people through Facebook and YouTube. Ms. Coutelle mentioned the risk of leaks from in camera meetings and the fact that it is impossible to eradicate things written in cyberspace. Mr. Bélanger concluded by saying that it is preferable for candidates to campaign in person in an electoral campaign.

Ms. Coutelle defended public funding for political parties, pointing to the scandals that tainted a number of campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s. Legislation passed in 1998 introduced penalties for future offenders but granted amnesty to people suspected of having engaged unlawfully in fundraising activities. Spending limits were introduced in

2007, which favoured the political left. The cost of public funding in France is similar to the cost in Canada, that is, parties receive €1.6 per vote obtained in the previous election on an annual basis. Parties are also required to field a certain number of female candidates or face a fine. Ms. Coutelle said she hoped that the trend toward negative advertising, which is common in presidential campaigns, would not be used during the legislative elections. She also described the main features of the new system of primary elections for the leadership of the Socialist Party. In these primaries, the voters will have to sign an affirmation stating that they support the objectives of the Socialist Party.

The discussion focused on the rules governing the definition of an election expense and the dates from which election advertising must be accounted for. Senator Bourdin reiterated the rules that apply in the Senate, where there is no spending cap, and subsequent comments clarified some of the details concerning the logistics of the Senate's electoral system. Mr. Bélanger, for one, expressed interest in the issue of collaboration among municipalities as part of a partisan process that is not overseen by the equivalent of the Chief Electoral Officer.

### **C. The Future of the Nuclear Industry Post Fukushima**

Mr. Aubin situated his presentation in the context of the economic crisis that has made the public more distrustful of their leaders, in particular with respect to the quality of the information they were given about the Fukushima disaster. He said the good thing to come out of the incident, however, is that it served as a reminder of the importance of public involvement in political debate and the need to guarantee a flow of reliable information in times of crisis. Because only 15% of Canada's electricity is generated by nuclear power (less than 3% in Quebec and New Brunswick), Canada is in an ambiguous situation where distrust of nuclear power benefits its oil producers but hurts its role as a uranium exporter and the already precarious development of CANDU technology. In Quebec and elsewhere, facilities are aging and pose the problem of long-term management: they can be either shut down or renovated, but both options entail considerable cost and risk. Mr. Aubin said he hoped to see Canadian regulations tightened, which would allow a greater shift toward wind technology.

During the discussion, Senator Tardif mentioned the Government of Canada's announcement that it was pulling out of the nuclear sector and said she feared the risk of responsibilities being transferred to the private sector. Ms. Brown, meanwhile, highlighted the progress that has been made in implementing measures to increase nuclear safety. She gave as an example a company in the region where she lives that manufactures parts used in some nuclear facilities; the safety requirements far exceed anything that could be achieved in a normal context. Mr. Colombier recalled the "Superphénix fiasco" in the 1980s and 1990s and the very high cost of dismantling the reactor.

Mr. Colombier read a summary of the progress report from the *Office parlementaire d'évaluation des choix scientifiques et technologiques* (the Office). The report described the priorities for action recommended by the Office: strengthening research on nuclear safety; managing subcontractors; security measures around facilities; government oversight of nuclear technology; crisis management performance; transparency

regarding the cost of nuclear power; and the adoption of international mechanisms for monitoring nuclear safety.

During the discussion, Mr. Desallangre mentioned the quality of the report from the Office and the very warm reception it received in the National Assembly. Unlike Canada, France has continued to call for common international rules and increased government control of the nuclear industry. Senator Tardif then raised the relevance of regulating not only the actual production process, but also the extraction and sale of uranium. Finally, Ms. Coutelle stressed the fact that all political parties in France are opposed to the privatization of nuclear companies.

#### **D. Family Policy: A Social and Economic Issue**

Senator Rivest's presentation was on government intervention in the process of changing models of the family. In Canada, this issue must be dealt with within the context of issues related to provincial and federal powers. Family policy is essentially an area of provincial jurisdiction, and the federal government is limited to supporting the provinces' initiatives. The Senator presented the major federal and provincial family policies. Topping the list of federal measures is the Child Tax Benefit, which provides non-taxable support, primarily for families whose income is less than the average. Next are the child care benefits of \$1,000 for each pre-school-age child, and tax credits for which the criteria vary depending on the family's specific circumstances. These federal programs follow the federal government's "spending power" in areas of provincial jurisdiction recognized in the Constitution. It is the provinces, however, that are more directly responsible for the programs. Senator Rivest pointed to the international recognition of Quebec's family support policies, particularly in recent OECD reports on the subject. The three main measures in Quebec are the following: tax measures that vary depending on the family's circumstances; low-cost subsidized child care; and an enhanced parental leave program that is additional to the benefits available to other Canadians through the Employment Insurance plan. In closing, Senator Rivest underscored the symbolic importance of the relative increase in the birth rate of Quebecers for the demographic weight of Quebec within Canada.

During the discussion, Mr. Trottier stated that the issue of birth rate is closely linked to the issue of integration of immigrants, because it has been shown that it is they who contribute the most to a steady or rising birth rate.

Senator Muguette Dini made a special appearance to present France's point of view on this issue. Following a visit to Quebec in 2010, she said she was pleased to see the scope of the programs the province has put in place. She pointed out that programs in France are very centralized. Nearly two thirds of the French budget for family policies is taken up by the allowances paid for second and subsequent children. The allowances paid to families with four or more children are very large. Other policies are adjusted based on specific circumstances: family income, single parent, disabled child, etc. There is no universal child care system, but access to the network of daycare centres, which is controlled by municipalities, is based on family income. Parental leave is a key component of family policies, because in France, 80% of women are in the labour force, and parental leave allows them to keep their job. There is some reluctance to extend

parental leave because a longer period of leave could be an impediment to career advancement. Splitting leave between the parents therefore seems to be the way to go.

Ms. Coutelle noted that there is no demonstrable link between policies supporting a rising birth rate and fluctuations in the birth rate. The OECD says that France is doing well but could do better. The difficulty lies in ensuring that family support measures do not impede women's career advancement. The Senator expressed the view that equitable sharing of household duties is for that reason a public issue. She also recommended that paternal leave not transferrable to the mother be introduced, particularly for disadvantaged families, but there is a great deal of resistance from employers.

During the discussion, the Senator pointed out that it is difficult to balance work and family. Mr. Colombier stated that this is something he sees frequently among parliamentarians who are also mothers. Ms. Coutelle gave a few examples of job pressure that still exists when an employee has to leave early for family reasons. Mr. Gourde stated, however, that one of the most important criteria used now to attract qualified employees is flexibility in terms of work schedules. This has perhaps not yet had sufficient impact on low-paying jobs, but it is certainly an encouraging trend.

#### **E. Issues related to the Canada-European Union Free Trade Agreement and the Need to Retain Special Treatment of Cultural Exchanges**

Mr. Bélanger spoke about the many issues being discussed in the preliminary negotiations on a free trade agreement, with emphasis on six files that are getting special attention: agricultural products; non-agricultural products; trade in services; protection of investments; government procurement; and geographical indications. One problem that has a bearing on all aspects of the negotiations lies in determining equivalencies between levels of government. In Canada's view, the fact that France, for example, is considered to be a sub-entity in relation to the European Union, on the same level as a Canadian province, is unfair. This would mean that a French company could bid on a provincial contract in Canada, but a Canadian company could not bid on a contract under the authority of a canton in Switzerland, for example. Mr. Bélanger then mentioned the Government of Canada's refusal to include a clause that would exempt culture. A cultural exemption of that sort was incorporated into NAFTA, at Canada's initiative. If there were no such exemption in an agreement with the European Union, the United States could reopen NAFTA. In the late 1990s, the United States went to the WTO to challenge policies designed to protect Canadian periodicals.

During the discussion, Mr. Godin reiterated his party's fundamental position against free trade. Senator Bourdin spoke about the need to involve the provinces, because occupations are regulated by 440 different organizations, and most of those organizations are under provincial jurisdiction. Ms. Brown added that occupations are a problem even within Canada because provincial regulations are sometimes incompatible with one another.

Senator Bourdin spoke about the negotiations between the European Union and Canada in the broader context of competition between the North American economy

and the European economy. He said that an agreement between Canada and the European Union would enable American companies to operate in European markets through their Canadian subsidiaries, and in return, European companies would want access to the American market if they invested in Canada. Canada is therefore regarded as a Trojan horse by both sides. He also illustrated some of the stumbling blocks that arise in such negotiations, such as geographical indicators. Canada has a trademark system, and there is no tradition of associating food products with particular regions. If Europe gets its way, it would be impossible for a Canadian company to advertise its cheese as Alberta camembert, for example. Also under dispute are the creation of an outside-customs zone for the fishery in Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon and the always sensitive issue of the oil sands. Some would want to classify products that come from the oil sands as separate products.

During the discussion, Mr. Bélanger asked the French parliamentarians how the cultural exemption might be a problem for France. Mr. Colombier and Senator Bourdin replied that they did not see any specific problems in France, but added that other members of the European Union might take the view that a cultural exemption would create a risk of minority groups in their countries seeking an exemption for themselves as part of their own nationalistic demands.

## **II. Meetings and Visits**

### **The French Nuclear Industry**

Following the discussion of the post-Fukushima situation, the delegation visited a nuclear power station that is currently under construction and nuclear waste treatment facilities.

The morning of September 2<sup>nd</sup>, the delegation visited the EDF nuclear power station in Flamanville. Company representatives Didier Lambert and David Newhouse gave a presentation on the features of the power station and on the entire cycle from extraction of the uranium to treatment of the radioactive waste. The delegation was taken to visit the construction site of a new-generation EPR (European Pressurized Reactor) and see the safety measures incorporated into the design. During the discussion, Mr. Lambert explained that the safety measures were based on projected disaster scenarios over a period of 1,000 years. Mr. Colombier asked for clarification on the status of negotiations regarding the sale of that type of reactor. Ms. Coutelle added that the main concerns are related to the fact that subcontractors working for the lead construction company are not subject to the same safety controls.

In the afternoon, the delegation visited the Areva La Hague reprocessing plant. Every aspect of the facilities, which are impressively sophisticated and complex, highlights the safety concerns that are inherent in the nuclear waste recycling process. Highly professional guides took small groups of delegates through the treatment process, from dry unloading, to storage of fuels in pools, to vitrification, all under international control. Every step in the process is controlled at a distance from futuristic control rooms. The delegation found that the advanced level of technology renders it nearly impossible for non-experts to comprehend, which means that the public has to have a great deal of



trust in the national and international authorities responsible for safety and the specialists on whom political officials have to rely.

## **The Battle of Normandy**

Saturday September 3<sup>rd</sup> was a particularly emotional day, as the delegation visited the sites where the tragic events of the Battle of Normandy unfolded. The battle began with the landing on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944, and continued until the end of August, claiming the lives of about 100,000 Allied soldiers, including 5,000 Canadians.

The day began with a memorial ceremony and the laying of a wreath at the Bény-sur-Mer/Revières Canadian War Cemetery by Senator Tardif on behalf of Canada and Mr. Colombier on behalf of France. The mayors of the two municipalities, Hubert Delalande and Daniel Guérin, welcomed the delegation.

The delegation then travelled to Juno Beach, where 15,000 Canadian soldiers landed the morning of June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944. After a brief stop at the site where General de Gaulle landed, the delegation was given a warm welcome at the Juno Beach Centre in Courseulles-sur-Mer by the director of the centre, Nathalie Worthington, and the first deputy mayor, Rémy Simon. The Centre is the only museum dedicated to the Battle of Normandy and is unique in that it is Canadian. After a ceremony at the war memorial where wreaths were laid by senator Tardif and Mr. Colombier, the members of the delegation were given a guided tour of the museum.

The delegation continued on to Bernières-sur-Mer, across from the section of Juno Beach where the Régiment de la Chaudière landed. After being greeted by the mayor, Maryvonne Mottin, the members visited the Maison des Canadiens, which served as a landmark during the landing, and viewed artifacts from the first day of fighting.

The delegation's next stop was Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer, where they were greeted by a fanfare and a number of local dignitaries, French veterans and their families. "La Marseillaise" and "O Canada" were played, and a moving ceremony took place in front of the site named La Brèche des Acadiens in honour of the soldiers from New Brunswick's North Shore Regiment who liberated the village the evening of June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944. Acadian senator Gérald Comeau and Acadian MP Yvon Godin laid wreaths. During the presentations, the honorary mayor of Saint-Aubin, Pierre Letellier, gave an account of the events that have left an indelible mark on the community. Senator Tardif stated that the shared experience of the tragedy affirmed yet again the depth of the friendship that exists between France and Canada.

In the afternoon, the delegation was greeted by Michel le Baron, Mayor of Cintheaux, and took part in a memorial ceremony and wreath laying by Senator Tardif and Mr. Colombier at the Cintheaux Canadian War Cemetery.

The delegation was then received at the majestic Mémorial de Caen by Director Stéphane Grimaldi. The members gathered in the Canadian Garden of Remembrance and were then given a brief tour of the museum.

The day ended with a reception at the General Council of Calvados hosted by Senator Jean-Léonce Dupont.

## **Mont-Saint-Michel**

On September 4<sup>th</sup>, the delegation travelled to this historic site, where they were greeted by the administrator, Jean-Marc Bouré. Following a reception at the town hall, the members were given a tour of the site and the Abbey by an eloquent and well-informed guide.

At the end of the day, the members had a peaceful moment at a meeting with two representatives of the Monastic Fraternities of Jerusalem. The religious community recently settled on Mont-Saint-Michel to perpetuate the spiritual foundations that make the site what it is.

## **The Sarthe region**

The delegation spent two days – September 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> – visiting sites and groups in the municipality of Sarthe, where they were introduced to land reform projects in France.

The delegation began the day on September 5<sup>th</sup> with a visit to the *24 Heures du Mans* race track at Le Mans and the Musée de l'automobile. Hervé Guyomard, a passionate and knowledgeable member of the Automoblie Club de l'Ouest, gave the members a guided tour.

In the afternoon, the members of the delegation met representatives of the *2<sup>ème</sup> Régiment d'infanterie de marine*, who talked about their experience in Afghanistan. The soldiers gave the parliamentarians a warm welcome, and there was a very frank discussion of the consequences of withdrawing from Afghanistan.

On September 6<sup>th</sup>, the delegation was welcomed at Sablé in the St-Laurent industrial zone, the site of the Loué poultry plant. This star of the French food industry raises grain-fed free-range chickens. The company maintains a relatively high price point and tries to avoid overproduction and dumping of its products, which requires careful planning. The plant shares a portion of its profits with its employees, and an active corporate committee manages labour relations in a way that makes the company part of the community.

At the end of the day, the delegation met Christine Marchand, President of the Sarthe Communes Community, a political and administrative entity created as part of decentralization in France. The Community is unique in that it pools the resources of rural and urban municipalities under its authority, some more economically developed than others, so that the level of wealth is the same in all municipalities. The organization has carried out many successful land and infrastructure development projects, such as recreations centres, that serve the entire community.

## **Conclusion**

During the farewell dinner, hosted by Senator Cléach at his home and attended by a number of guests and senior staff from the Embassy of Canada in France, the French and Canadian parliamentarians indicated their complete satisfaction with the way the

meeting was organized, the themes that were chosen and discussed, the visits to the regions, and especially the visits to Memorials honouring the Canadian soldiers who died in the Battle of Normandy in 1944. In conclusion, the objectives of the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting were met with great appreciation by all. The parliamentarians also noted the great friendship they formed and agreed to meet in Canada in 2012. National Assembly member Georges Colombier announced that he would be leaving the Association soon because he has decided not to run in the French legislative election in June 2012. Senator Cléach indicated that he is actively looking for a successor to head the France-Canada friendship group in the Senate. The two parliamentarians received heartfelt thanks for their contribution to the development of the Association. Warm thanks were also extended to the staff of the French and Canadian parliaments and staff at the Embassy of Canada in France for their support of the Association's activities.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Claudette Tardif, Senator  
President, Canada-France Interparliamentary Association

## Travel Costs

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canada-France Interparliamentary Association
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	38th Annual Meeting of the Canada- France Interparliamentary Association
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Paris / Normandy / Pays de Loire, France
<b>DATES</b>	August 31 <sup>st</sup> to September 7 <sup>th</sup> , 2011
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	The Honourable Gérald Comeau The Honourable Jean-Claude Rivest The Honourable Claudette Tardif
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Robert Aubin The Honourable Mauril Bélanger, P.C. Mrs. Lois Brown Mr. Yvon Godin Mr. Jacques Gourde Mr. Bernard Trottier
STAFF	Mr. Serge Pelletier, Executive Secretary Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré, Analyst
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>\$ 38, 273. 08</b>
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	<b>\$ 0, 00</b>
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	<b>\$ 494, 73</b>
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	<b>\$ 4, 260. 07</b>
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	<b>\$ 1, 994. 73</b>
<b>MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES</b>	<b>\$ 0. 00</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 45, 022. 61</b>